

CUS ON COMMUNITY

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Slow going on historic renovation

170-year-old Brentsville Courthouse needs work

By KARI PUGH
Manassas Bureau

BRENTSVILLE — Before the Prince William County Historical Commission and the Park Authority can open the 170-year-old Brentsville Courthouse to the public, they need to keep it from falling down.

While the Historical Commission is working on renovating the old structure and looking for possible ways it could be used, its members are doing it in small increments.

Budget constraints on an already small allowance make historical preservation projects difficult to undertake.

At least \$11,000 of the yearly \$33,000 budget has been spent, said Rick Smith, a liaison officers with the commission.

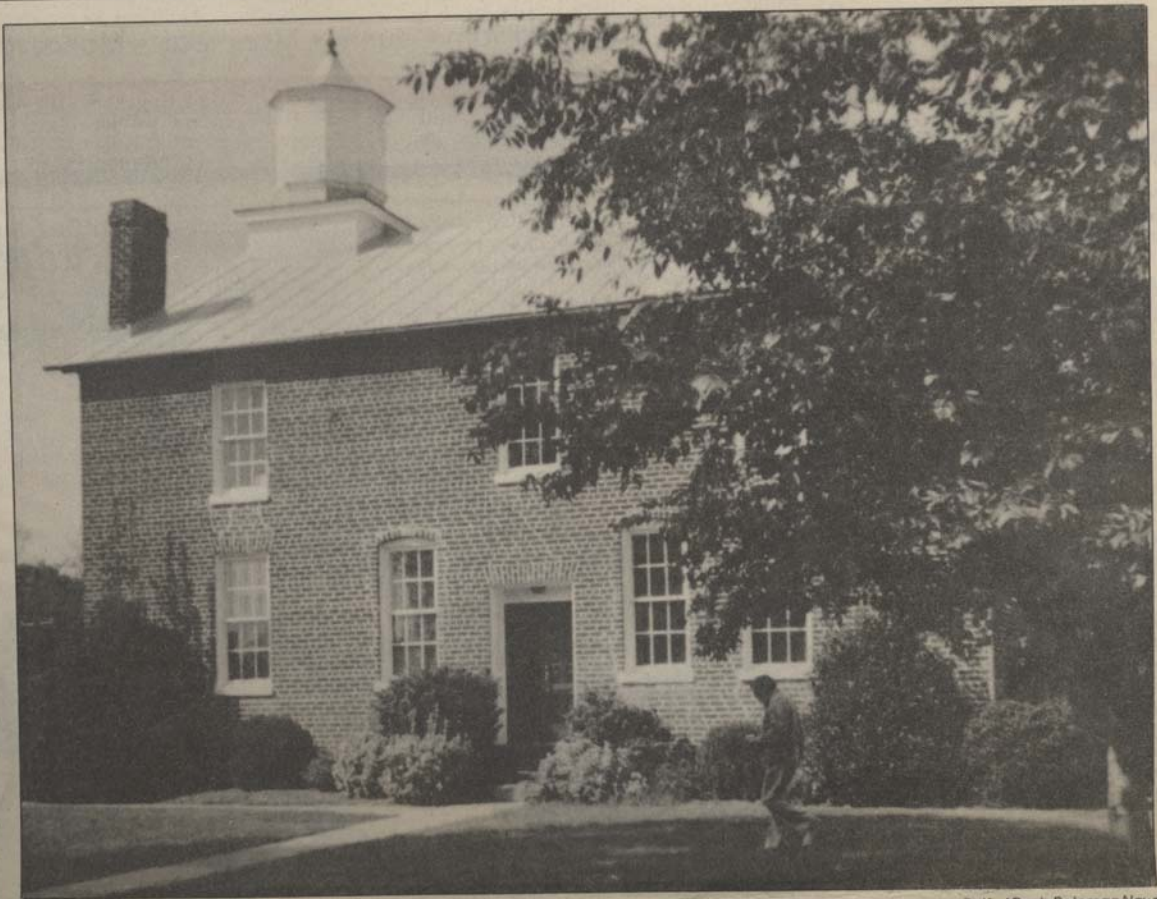
Now, the commission faces a 15 percent budget cut, so members plan to renovate the old courthouse in small sections.

The roof on the Brentsville Courthouse needs to be stabilized, members say. It is not in danger of falling right away, but commission members fear it cannot endure too many more large storms, said member Jane MacDonald.

"It was the county seat for over 50 years," said Alisa Repard, a spokeswoman for the Park Authority. "It's important that Prince William citizens be able to go in and see where their county government began."

The Brentsville building was the fourth structure to serve as the Prince William County Courthouse, according to a history of county courthouses.

It was built between 1820 and 1822 when the county seat was moved from Dumfries to a more central location in Brentsville.



By Kari Pugh-Potomac News

The 170-year-old Brentsville Courthouse was one of Prince William County's earliest courthouse buildings.

The two-story, Flemish brick, Federal-style structure was designed by William Claytor of Orange County.

Both the courthouse and the adjacent jail were constructed on a three-acre site for public purposes when Brentsville was established in 1822.

When the county seat moved to Manassas in 1893, the courthouse was transformed into a school and remained a schoolhouse until 1913.

In the late 1930s, the building became a community center and for most of 1941, it was used as a mattress factory.

In 1979, the courthouse and jail were transformed into the Brentsville Historic Recreation Area.

The Prince William County Park Authority used the courthouse as a headquarters until the mid-1980s.

"The whole administrative center was out there," she said. "It was really crowded."

The first Prince William County courthouse was built in 1731 on the south side of the Occoquan River. The structure is no longer standing, but it was probably built of brick. The courthouse was then moved from the Occo-

quan to Cedar Run on what is now the Quantico Marine Corps base in 1743. In 1762, the courthouse moved from Cedar Run to Dumfries, which was then a bustling port.

The Dumfries population declined in the early 1800s due to the silting of Quantico Creek. The courthouse was then moved to Brentsville.

The county seat was moved for the last time in 1893 to Manassas. The old courthouse on Lee Avenue has now been restored and houses several county government services.